

## **Leadership Opportunities in Environmental Public Health**

Opportunities for outstanding leadership training in environmental public health are generally infrequent. That is precisely why I was quick to apply for a fellowship in the first National Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute (EPHLI). The EPHLI was produced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Public Health Leadership Development Network, and the Louisville Metro Health Department. The EPHLI's function is to improve environmental public health leadership nationally in an effort to build leadership capacity. Cultivating leadership capacity at present is especially important as the national environmental health workforce continues to mature and promising environmental health professionals are in need of development.

To advance the leadership skills of EPHLI fellows, the Institute has focused its goals on enhancing outcomes of environmental health core functions and essential services, improving environmental health in communities, and increasing leadership capacity of environmental health professionals. The Institute has implemented numerous methods to guide fellows in their leadership development. These include an Individual Development Plan that involves a 360-degree assessment, in-depth systems thinking training, education and hands-on practice of the 10 Essential Services of Environmental Health, transformational leadership training, and an individual leadership project.

The individual leadership project is meant to be one of considerable magnitude and focuses on resolving a local environmental health concern identified by fellows in their community. By working through the individual leadership project, each fellow attains progress in addressing the public health concern and learns to apply specific leadership skills taught by the EPHLI. Fellows also develop skills as a "reflective" practitioner by thinking carefully about the roots of the problem and making decisions based on the problem's origin. Participating fellows also gain knowledge through the Institute that enables them to help other EPHLI members become more reflective learners. All individual leadership projects will be posted on the EPHLI web site at the end of the fellowship and some will be published.

The EPHLI is comprised of 32 environmental health professionals selected from 17 states, 8 mentors, faculty members, and consultants. Fellows are selected from all levels and walks of environmental health leadership: field staff, program managers, deputy administrators, state directors, university professors, and state legislators. Small groups of 3-5 fellows are assigned to each mentor who keeps in close communication with the fellows throughout the year-long Institute commitment. Faculty members are also assigned to the fellow/mentor groups to provide additional support. Washington State currently has 3 individuals involved in the Institute: Carl Osaki as a faculty member, Chuck Treser as a mentor, and myself as a fellow. All participants of the EPHLI meet 3-4 times throughout the year, generally in the Midwest Region. Once an

individual is accepted as a fellow through initial application and a CDC interview, all expenses the fellow incurs are absorbed by the EPHLI.

My experience as a fellow in the first EPHLI has been exceptionally positive and filled with both personal and professional growth. Participation in the systems thinking activities and lectures, coupled with work on my individual community project, has broadened my approach and methodology to problem solving critical environmental health concerns. Learning how to apply the 10 Essential Services of Environmental Health has provided me with the skills to more thoroughly assess and evaluate public health programs. The 360-degree assessment has been exceedingly helpful to me as I structure and implement my personal development plan. Lastly, the relationships I have established with EPHLI colleagues across the nation have proven to be invaluable to me. I look forward to maintaining those relationships for years to come and accessing the vast environmental health expertise that is represented by the EPHLI fellows and mentors that I have come to know.

I encourage all individuals associated with environmental health to continue to learn about the Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute and what it has to offer to emerging leaders in Washington State. For Environmental Health Directors, the Institute can be an invaluable and affordable method of providing essential leadership skills to developing staff that would otherwise not be available. For additional information on the EPHLI, access the web site at [www.heartlandcenters.slu.edu/ephli/](http://www.heartlandcenters.slu.edu/ephli/) or contact me at 425-339-8683. The future of environmental health in Washington State will only be as good as the leadership navigating it. The EPHLI can help our local leadership in developing a strong, steady course.

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